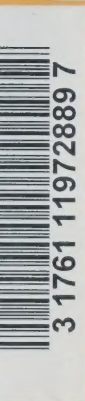


CHINESE

ORGANIZATION: Panel Presentation

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BY WESLEY LORE

at the Chinese Intercultural Seminar

Woodgreen Community Centre

January 29, 1974

Government
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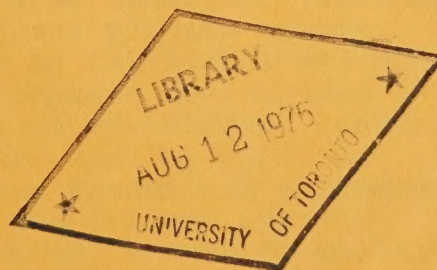


Ontario

Ministry of
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CHINESE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

by Wesley Lore

History

The history of Chinese in Canada isn't a happy one. The Chinese, as you well know, came over in the beginning by the hundreds as cheap labour to build the railroads out west. They planned to work hard, earn a fortune and return rich to China. Unfortunately most didn't return because fortunes were not to be made, there were only promises of fortunes, and these promises continued to draw Chinese to Canada.

Soon there were a great many Chinese on the west coast. Many had taken trades and had gone into business in competition with the non-Chinese population. This threat of too many Chinese, and the private sector's fear of the Chinese dominating the commercial markets prompted the government to establish a Royal Commission. In 1886 the report culminated in a "head tax" of \$50 to be imposed on each Chinese entering Canada. Also the numbers were limited to one Chinese per 50 tons of cargo imported. This restriction did not prove to be effective and by 1900 the population of Chinese approached 20,000. The head tax was increased to \$100 in 1901 and to \$500 in 1904. At \$500 the head tax was effective (you could appreciate the true value of \$500 in those days).

At that time, to compound the trouble, Chinese became very efficient in the trades and in commerce. This was seen as a threat by the non-Chinese private sector. Race riots broke out, beginning in California and spreading to Vancouver. Injury and complete destruction of businesses and private property of the Chinese resulted. Some local governments instituted laws prohibiting Chinese from working at or owning trades and businesses in direct competition with the non-Chinese private sector. So the Chinese were forced to take on menial work running laundries and restaurants.

However these riots had a useful result. They united a sector of the Chinese community to form an association which appealed to Ottawa for compensation for the damages incurred in the riots. They received \$100,000 but no changes in the laws.

This united action was the first real step towards any association to achieve political and social change which would better Chinese community life.

Although the head tax proved effective in decreasing immigration, Chinese were still entering Canada. The government enacted a series of laws to prohibit immigration into Canada. The first was the Labour Exclusion Act of the early 1900's which made it mandatory for all Chinese immigrants to enter only as students.

Then in 1923 a bill was introduced limiting Chinese immigration into Canada to students and merchants. Later this law was revised to forbid ALL Chinese from entering Canada. In fact, from 1924-47, no Chinese were admitted into Canada. Also, if for any reason one left Canada for more than a year he was not permitted to return. This was the only law ever enacted by a Canadian government to prohibit any race from entering. Such a political and social climate could not help but create a type of Chinese community very different from any other ethnic community you may know.

The Chinese community of Canada was largely composed of men since families and wives were not permitted to immigrate. This resulted in an insular community based on distrust of a government wholly prejudiced against it and a social environment totally opposed to any improvement of the attitude toward Chinese.

The Chinese as you well know have traditionally held a deep respect for authority, thus they seldom questioned the actions of government, even unjust ones. Associations created to change political and social attitudes did not exist. Tongs (secret or fraternal societies), family and village associations, however, did exist, but they were founded largely for socializing reasons.

However, by 1947 the government took a more liberal attitude. Chinese were given citizenship and the right to vote. Wives and families (children under 18) were allowed to enter. Still many restrictions and unnecessary hardships existed in the immigration laws.

Because of this unfairness, Chinese Benevolent Associations sprang up. They became more vocal after 1947 because they were now accepted in the Canadian mainstream. They were

probably the first real associations formed to achieve some smattering of political and social change. Equally important, they were instrumental in letting the non-Chinese population see more of what the Chinese community was. Family associations tended to be very insular whereas the benevolent societies and associations with their political and social activity, although limited, brought the Chinese way of life to the Canadian public. They petitioned to Ottawa for more relaxed standards in the immigration laws and, after a time asked for equal treatment.

In the late forties children were being educated, enrolling in universities and also entering the business and commercial mainstream. Chinese began to be more aware of their situation. They began to realize that changes could be brought about fairly quickly by social and political action which they themselves could institute.

So you see, historically the Chinese were taken advantage of. Their respect for authority combined with authority's prejudices effectively curtailed any real development of associations geared to social betterment.

The Change

As the Chinese population itself became more accepted, it became more aware and began to institute changes. Associations didn't really change Canadian society's perspectives. A RATHER WEAK BEGINNING BUT A BEGINNING NEVERTHELESS! Now associations are forming, pushing for human rights, equal opportunities, betterment of social institutions that can serve or already serve the Chinese community, such as better housing, old age homes, welfare and health services, and funding to aid in the preservation of culture.

Parent associations are actively seeking changes within the school system - something unheard of in the past. They want public schools, particularly the core area schools with high percentages of Chinese children, to teach the Chinese language as a second language.

Community Organization

Perhaps we should now turn our attention to more specific development of Chinese associations. I can easily illustrate this development and the reasons for it by tracing the Chinese community's growth in Toronto.

As you probably know, Chinatown and the residential community are located in and around the core of downtown Toronto. The main business section of stores and

restaurants runs from Elizabeth Street to the Spadina-Dundas-College area. The residents, now approaching 25,000 in Toronto, are concentrated in this same area and to the east in the Don Vale-Broadview-Pape district. However the Chinese community was not always situated there. It started in the Sherbourne-Queen location, moving to the York-Queen district and in the late 1940's, and in the 1950's reached its greatest commercial and residential concentration in the Queen-Elizabeth-Dundas area.

Expanding industry and commerce has always forced the Chinese community to move. In the mid 1950's, the greatest blow to the downtown Chinese community came with the building of the civic centre and the expansion of the court house. Then, as in the era prior to 1950, the Chinese community accepted the move even though it received at times shoddy treatment from the civic government. Eviction notices were delivered with only a short time left to move. Prices offered were unquestionably low.

Now outlooks have changed and community associations are fighting back to preserve what is rightfully theirs. Young families are being raised, and, because the social climate is improving, communities are becoming more open and interlocked. Although this process is good in many respects, it is beginning to threaten the Chinese cultural identity.

This threat has caused many younger parents and youths to start associations and groups to try to preserve their heritage. They are seeing their culture not as something to be cherished because it is traditional, but rather as something to be cherished and maintained because some of its outlooks and teachings are far better than many of the outlooks and teachings of the non-Chinese community. A RATHER PRACTICAL ATTITUDE.

The younger people are now better educated, (AND THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT FACT). This allows them to reach an economic level where they don't have to scrape for a livelihood, where they have enough time to evaluate the direction of their lives and establish their own priorities.

When these priorities are threatened they now have the time and money to defend them. For example, The Chinese Canadian Association was founded in the early fifties because of fear that the Korean War, with Chinese mainland participation, might cause the government to establish the internment camps such as those used to imprison the Japanese Canadians during World War II. To

me the Association represents the new attitude of Chinese in Canada. Associations like this are beginning to get involved actively in the political sphere to try to change the laws and systems that do not function properly for the Chinese community.

This new attitude has seen the growth of Chinese parents' associations to ask for changes in the school system. It has seen the creation of an old age home by the Mon Sheong Foundation through private funds and government financing.

So as you see, the role of the associations has changed. They are actively instituting change rather than hoping for it.

THE DEMAND FOR CHANGE NOW EXISTS, NOT JUST THE CLIMATE.

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